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ABSTRACT

After an introductory section which points out that the responsibility of small and rural schools is to provide all children with a quality education, and that Boards of Education must decide what is best for all children in the community, the paper briefly describes 16 exemplary programs involving cooperation between school districts. The necessity for small school systems to overcome their reluctance (often due to squabbling over locus of decision-making control) to join in regional and cooperative programs is noted. Cooperative sharing of programs, students, and teachers in districts in New York, Minnesota, and Alabama is discussed. Three major tasks for the 1980's, critical to solving problems of rural schools and small districts, are stated: basic research on small school problems, practices, and unique features; curriculum and program development that builds on these features; and elaboration and instrumentation of models for funding and regulating small schools. Lists of 24 strengths, 14 reasons for problems in meeting student needs, and 11 conditions for effective organizations to blend sharing and smallness are provided. Conclusions indicate that organizational arrangements in leadership within cooperative systems themselves are more critical to survival or death of the cooperative programs than environmental conditions within organizations. (MH)

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FACILITATING INTER-DISTRICT COOPERATION

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Facilitating Inter-District Cooperation

It is the duty and responsibility of the Board of Education and the Superintendent to make sure that we provide the most effective, efficient, and varied educational atmosphere possible for students within the school district. The State legally empowers the Board of Education to develop policy for a district, and empowers the appointed superintendent to carry out these policies to the best of his or her ability. It is the responsibility of the Board of Education to develop policies based on the best interest of the community and the identified needs of the students within that community. It is the responsibility of the Superintendent, in conjunction with his entire staff, to keep abreast of the educational profession, to alert the Board of Education and community to necessary changes based on the best facts and information available, and to recommend to the Board of Education actions that can be taken to best meet the needs of the students within the school district.

In adhering to this duty and responsibility, the Board of Education and the Superintendent are often faced with difficult decisions. Many times these decisions require a change or a series of changes that may, on the surface, not appear to be in the best interest of the students and the community, but, as is often times the case, the change is made or recommended because it has long-range positive implications.

Many small school districts are now more than ever faced with just such a predicament. No institution or organization is exempt from change.

Today, the student that returns to his alma mater ten years after graduation can expect to find changes, not only in personnel, but also in personnel policies and teaching practices. It is fairly easy to identify changes in institutional patterns after they have occurred. It is more difficult to analyze changes while they are going on. It is still more difficult to predict changes or to influence significantly the direction and the tempo of changes already underway. Yet, more and more, those who have managerial functions in rural school districts must analyze and predict impending changes, and take deliberate actions to shape change according to the needs of the district involved.

Many small school districts have already shown themselves to be adept at implementing both substantive and structural reform even in the face of strong community resistance. The emphasis should not be on implementing reform or change for change's sake, but rather on developing reform and change worth implementing. The location and intensity of community resistance is often difficult to ascertain at first even for the most experienced educational leader.

As I further develop the need for the recommendations that are going to follow, it is important to understand that our number one priority in schools, and in anything that we ever do recommend, is that we are taking into consideration, the needs of all of the children, K-12, and attempting to best meet their needs given the present economic conditions and curriculum possibilities within the school system. We must do this, while adhering to the legal necessities of state mandated programs, and the financial assistance available.

The recommendations that are to follow must take state mandates

into consideration, and the fact that the State usually has a history of not giving schools any additional financial assistance to implement these mandated programs.

Presently, small school systems could be faced with a number of problems that we must take care of internally.

1. Often we may have overcrowding in one or two buildings and a great deal of empty space in other buildings in the same district. We must balance the enrollment in each building by shifting the student population, if necessary.
2. We must be aware that the rural community is changing. The centers of population are shifting in some instances back to the rural areas.
3. We should be quite concerned about the reading, language arts, math, and technological (new basics) skill levels as exhibited by our students. Effort should be made to identify competencies, and to establish a program whereby we could improve these basic skill areas.
4. Presently, class size in a number of grade levels, may exceed a good teaching-learning situation or fall below financial capabilities. We must be able to reorganize the setting so that we can return the class size back to a more workable level, especially in the lower grade areas.
5. Even though school systems may have been consolidated for years, there is usually still some inflexibility and lack of coordination of services due to petty community rivalries or jealousy.
6. We may have a number of teachers who are teaching outside their

areas of qualification. We may also have, with the advent of girls' sports, coaches and facilities being stretched to the limit. We must address ourselves to these problems and alleviate them.

In dealing with the needs of the students, the state mandates, the financial situation, and the present internal problems of small schools as outlined in the preceding paragraphs, the community also has a responsibility. We must keep the needs of all of the children uppermost in mind. There must be a lessening of the degree of special interests within the community. It is important that the rural community recognize that all children are entitled to a quality education, and a quality education is one which allows a child to learn that he lives in a multi-racial, increasingly technical society and world. A world which is largely made up of many diverse backgrounds. A world in which no human being can choose to live apart from fellow human beings and continue to be a contributing member of society.

Placing students in close proximity with each other will not by itself solve all the problems plaguing school systems with regard to unitization and acceptance. All peoples accrue benefits through contact with others, and this provides students with an opportunity not only to know, but to share experience in cultures that are an integral part of the diverse world in which we live. More attention must be given to conditions of unity, positive appreciation of diversity, and constructive inter-group activities.

The Board of Education has a responsibility to listen to the community and the administration when it presents the facts as it sees them.

Board decisions must be based on the facts, and a determination of what is best for all the children in the community. The Board of Education legally and morally must make the decision, not the community itself. Boards of Education are involved in a representative democracy, not a true democracy, where the old town meeting concept is implemented and the community votes on every decision. In a representative democracy, the community elects representatives that reflect in general, the community's points of view, and will look out for the best interest of the community in general during their term of service.

A child ought to be able to experience immediately, if possible, that feeling of success upon which the continuation of the learning process depends. A youngster ought to be able to see and feel that today is better than yesterday, and tomorrow will be better than today because of what is going to or has happened in the classroom. For that to happen, all segments of the school/community must understand and actively pursue the goal of sharing and cooperation that reaches beyond just delivery of service. Shared efforts and resources provide the opportunity for children to learn within an environment that accords them the highest possibility for success.

In a paper entitled "A View of BOCES for the 80's"[1] a number of historical problems were identified which complicate the role of sharing. The major points outlined as historical problems are:

1. Inflation continually pressures us into having to meet ever-increasing costs.
2. The perplexing demand to spread ever-thinning revenues into ever-better schools with ever-increased efficiencies comes from

the taxpayer and from the lawmaker as well.

3. Increased competition for the tax dollar is apparent among governmental agencies as well as at all levels of education.
4. Many smaller school districts find themselves increasingly incapable of supplying the funds or the staff needed to meet the mandates of an ever-swelling flood of legislation and regulation.
5. Recent cultural changes such as population changes in mobility, the drug scene, the development of infinitely differing moral standards, newly found amounts of leisure time, and the increased acceptability of trial and social experimentation have put demands on the school system that reach beyond the previously well defined limits of the school day, the curriculum, and the classroom.

If the school systems cannot help the student to be successful in a complex world, then our society has failed itself, education does not meet its primary responsibility and is thus of little value. With today's ever-diminishing base of resources, the only way possible for any local school system to keep pace is through a system of sharing. It is more necessary than ever to find the most economical approach possible to meeting today's ever-increasing and complex demands. Compromises must be reached and the realization made that everyone in the community is not going to be satisfied.

EXEMPLARY PROGRAMS

There are a number of exemplary sharing programs or consolidation efforts around the country that are worth mentioning. This paper does

not pretend to list all or even a majority of these programs. The programs briefly outlined below are those that seem to offer examples of unique approaches in order to meet the needs of the youngsters and also to provide the most economical educational services available.

1. Sacramento, CA - In Sacramento a great many cooperative efforts have occurred such as the sponsorship of intramural programs in summer schools, development of school/park facilities, vocational education for students entering recreation related fields and joint surplus use of school property. This cooperative atmosphere between local recreation and educational agencies has also resulted in joint school maintenance programs, joint use of buses, leasing portions of schools with declining enrollments, and joint maintenance and operations of community parks and pools.[2]

2. Oregon - Sixteen school districts covering 5100 square miles and 19,000 students in a largely rural part of Oregon, in order to comply with Public Law 94-142, developed supportive mechanisms for pooling their federal funds under an Education Service District Plan. In order to provide special education and related services, ten steps which a local district must follow to comply with federal and state regulations were identified and the persons responsible for each step were delineated.[3]

3. Minnesota - In southeastern Minnesota four small school districts developed nine basic programs which are coordinated by a steering committee. Agendas are developed with input from four subcommittees in the areas of high school programs, general

curriculum, general administration, and public relations.[4]

4. Minnesota - There are 61 Cooperative Vocational Centers in Minnesota which are joint efforts of two or more neighboring school districts to provide secondary vocational education and to strengthen, extend and expand existing vocational programs. Centers generally use the simulated method of job training and operate 2-3 hours per day. Students enroll in their home districts and take courses in both the home school and the center.[5]

5. Texas - In 1967, 20 regional education service centers were established in Texas. The centers have no regulatory functions; therefore, offerings vary from center to center, depending on local needs. Typical cooperative services provided to small districts include: Migrant Education, Title I Programs, Support Services, and Special Education for districts with fewer than 3,000 students.[6]

6. Maine - The Maine Mastery Learning Consortium composed of 16 school districts was formed because it was learned that the money and time spent in staff development without follow-up rarely resulted in significant classroom change or successful classroom implementation. The exemplary center for reading instruction, a validated mastery learning program, is used requiring three one-week sessions for teachers. Several activities are offered including content demonstrations, observations, conferences, mini workshops, awareness sessions, and team teaching.[7]

7. Principals assisting principals - In a paper presented at the NASSP Convention in Miami in 1980 Learning Environments Consortiums were discussed. These consortiums worked together for principals assisting principals in such activities as school site visits, common summer workshops, and the sharing of ideas and educational materials.[8]

8. Minnesota - School districts in southwest and west central Minnesota have developed educational cooperative service units, an intermediate agency that is an extension of the member schools. Instructional services include a teacher center to assist in-service training, curriculum development, etc.; an information network; an adult right to read program; career education; and a nutrition education and training program.[9]

9. Community School Centers - These have evolved from many experiments in interagency cooperation and community involvement. A community school center is a place that provides a variety of services that may include health, recreation, day care and after school care for the young, senior citizens programs, jobs placement, vocational and manpower training, public library, adult education, performance and creative arts, crafts, family and youth counseling, municipal services, and public K-12 education. It is also a forum for focusing community action and improving the quality of life for the residents.[10]

10. Southern States - Many southern states have developed an academic common market. The market is an interstate agreement among southern states for sharing uncommon programs. Participating

states are able to make arrangements for their residents who qualify for admission to enroll in specific programs in other states on an in-state tuition basis.[11]

11. Texas - Region 20 in the state of Texas serves 50 districts in 14 counties. It is organized to provide evaluation services to these districts.[12]

12. Alaska - Alaska is developing a rural industrial education outreach center which would function on a regional basis providing supportive services to several Alaskan school districts in the areas of needs assessments; identification, purchase, and distribution of instructional materials; design of competency based programs; teacher orientation and in-service training; and evaluation.[13]

13. Maryland - Eight public educational institutions serving three counties in Appalachian, MD have joined together to plan and develop public education on a regional basis. The four programs are conservation of education resources, community services, staff development, and public service communications satellite system. Other programs under consideration are manpower development, curriculum home-based education, facilities and equipment research and accountability, and regional educational support.[14]

14. Massachusetts - School districts in Massachusetts are looking toward cooperative agreements as alternatives to further consolidation or bigness. Cooperatives and collaboratives in Massachusetts are viewed as a politically acceptable alternative

to further reorganization through consolidation.[15]

15. Illinois - Through its participation in the council for area planning of educational services, Waubonsee Community College has attempted to do more with less by avoiding unnecessary duplication and encouraging shared services, facilities and programs. The council includes educational institutions at all levels from elementary schools to the university. It also includes public and private institutions, and formal as well as informal educational institutions.

16. New York - Ten school districts in West Central New York have formed a cooperative venture for students identified as high potential school dropouts. The program, entitled "Multi-Occupational Alternative Education Program," involves ninth and tenth grade youngsters who were identified in eighth grade as high potential dropouts. The school day consists of a combined program of academics and occupational education courses.

Small school systems have traditionally resisted the use of intermediate units, school corporations, multi-district units or other types of regional programs to serve children often because of squabbling over the locus of decision making control. Such squabbling can include who is in control, the location of the unit, and the loss of community pride and ownership in programs, not to mention the higher transportation costs. Yet, if small school districts do not face these challenges (they already face high costs for instructional salaries, administration, energy, maintenance, and offering very little curriculum variety to their students especially on the secondary level), serious problems

will continue to arise for the quality of their educational programs.

Resistance by small school districts to cooperative sharing of programs makes it extremely difficult to service the handicapped and gifted youngsters also. It is extremely difficult to recruit physical therapists, speech terhapists, or psychologists to provide necessary related services. These services often have to be purchased from private providers on a part-time contractual basis at a much more expensive price. In addition to problems of providing the necessary services to handicapped and gifted youngsters, it is extremely difficult to overcome being stymied by the inability to recruit appropriate personnel to small school systems and to rural areas. Thus, identification of handicapped and gifted youngsters remains very low in some of the rural and smaller district areas.

There are a number of school districts on Long Island in New York State that are attempting to address this issue of providing the services especially for gifted and talented youngsters.[16] For a number of years in a row BOCES #1 in Suffolk County, Long Island has conducted a summer institute for gifted and talented elementary, intermediate and secondary school youth. This has offered local school districts an opportunity to share outstanding teaching staff and community resources. During the summer of 1981, for instance, students from 12 districts participated in a skill-based curriculum development project.

There are many other ways that districts are sharing programs around the country. For instance, in Morton, MN[17] they are selling 2/5 of a counselor to a neighboring school district dividing up salary and mileage costs. They share an art teacher, a speech therapist, and a teacher of

learning disabilities. Again districts divide up the salary and mileage. The Morton School has also joined 128 other schools in a cooperative purchasing program. This has saved Morton approximately 5-40% on specific items. Morton also shares with other schools transportation costs to athletic events, music contests, and other extracurricular activities.

In Tuscumbia, AL six school systems are involved in an alternative school for 12-17 age students who needed temporary alternatives as a substitute for suspension or expulsion from school.[18] Eight school systems are also cooperating to provide adult basic education with courses offered in 30 centers throughout the three counties. Using mostly funds from the Applachian Regional Development Act, eight school systems in the area are providing a school health and information program.

A rather unique sharing program is occurring in rural Minnesota between district 209 Kensington and district 265 Hoffman.[19] They have paired their students in an effort to provide quality education despite declining enrollments. The school districts have remained separate government units, but the programs and students are together. Grades K-3 and 7-9 are located at Kensington and grades 4-6 and 10-12 are at Hoffman. Two bus loads of students are exchanged daily, and some teachers travel between schools. Decisions are made at a joint school board meeting, but legal actions are taken at individual district board meetings based on agreements made in the joint meetings.

When one considers the possibility of interdistrict cooperation there seems to be no limit. The limits are only stymied by the community's resistance to this kind of effort and the willingness of the staff and people involved to be creative and ingenious enough to establish such

programs. It seems that there are three major tasks for the 1980's which need to be accomplished as critical to the solution of the problems of small districts and rural schools. These are:

1. Basic research on small school problems, practices, and unique features.
2. Curriculum and program development which build on these features.
3. Elaboration and implementation of models for funding and regulating small schools.

Twenty-four years ago James B. Conant recommended that no high school should have fewer than 100 students in the graduating class. There have been a great many research studies on this conclusion over the last quarter of a century. Since that time there have been fewer and fewer high schools that have less than 100 in the graduating class. Personally, I believe this move is a step in a positive direction.

Most authorities agree that schools with fewer than 200 students have higher per pupil costs than do larger schools. Curriculum offerings in smaller schools are more limited, both in scope and in depth. This is particularly true in the vocational area and in the provision of special programs for the gifted, handicapped, and remedial students. Acquiring and retraining qualified staff is one of the greatest difficulties facing small schools today. It now appears that the supply of teachers is decreasing and many smaller districts are again going to experience difficulties in attracting and holding good teachers.

Recognizing the problems of declining enrollment that smaller districts face, there are still many benefits claimed for smallness rather than bigness. Recognizing that any list of suggested benefits of small

schools has items which only exemplify potential and may or may not be fulfilled. Below please find a list (certainly incomplete and subject to question) that may review some of the strengths that have been identified as characterizing small schools and that we want to maintain if at all possible by sharing programs:[20]

1. Close relations between faculty and administration.
2. Less red tape.
3. More participation in decision making by teachers and students.
4. Greater sense of community and school loyalty.
5. Closer relations between teachers and students.
6. Smaller teacher/pupil ratio.
7. Better opportunity for learner centered atmosphere and program.
8. Enhance potential for individual instruction.
9. Less ability grouping.
10. Greater opportunities for students to discover and develop their uniqueness and individual abilities.
11. Greater student participation in the activity program.
12. More recognition of the importance of each student and each teacher to the total school program.
13. Clear expectation that guidance become a function of every staff member.
14. Less time, effort and attention being devoted to discipline.
15. More demand for teachers to be generalists rather than specialists.
16. Closer relations among teachers.
17. Better situation for bringing about change.

18. The possibility, and maybe even the necessity, of multi-age classes.

19. Easier and more effective provision possible for student activities and away from school experience.

20. Better relations in cooperation with the community.

21. Closer teacher/parent relations.

22. More parent involvement with the school.

23. More teacher and student involvement in program development and school administration.

24. More human contact, reducing frustration and alienation, and improving morale of both students and school staff.

Small schools also have weaknesses. Some of them have been exaggerated or opportunities for their aleviation neglected, but they do exist. It seems, however, that a firm commitment to building on the potential and existing strength of small schools can help aleviate or eliminate the weaknesses, or counterbalance them with opportunities not available to teachers and students in extremely large schools.

Because of their size and isolation, rural and small school districts continue to have special problems in meeting both students' needs and requirements set by federal and State statutes and regulations. Various groups concerned with these schools have suggested that some of the reasons for these problems are that:[21]

1. The general decline in enrollment has exaggerated the already serious problems related to small size.

2. Real estate values in these districts are low compared to those in other types of communities.

3. Personal incomes in these districts are low compared to those in other types of communities.
4. Commerce and industry are at low levels compared to that in other types of communities.
5. Per pupil operating costs are high because of small scale operations.
6. Construction costs for utilities (e.g., sewer, water) are higher because of lack of access to municipal services.
7. Transportation costs are higher because of low population density.
8. Extra costs are incurred as a result of the use of school facilities as a community center.
9. Limited staffs do not include sufficient special talents to deal with the complex problems the districts face.
10. It is often difficult for these districts to secure, hold and upgrade highly competent teaching and support service staffs.
11. Schools in rural areas must exert extra efforts to provide exposure to cultural resources in order for pupils to achieve full potential.
12. Scheduling conflicts in small schools create barriers to accommodating the needs of individual pupils.
13. The resources of other human service agencies which help schools deal with pupils' special needs are not readily accessible to rural schools.
14. Some schools in rural areas have difficulty meeting State and federal mandates for children with special needs because the numbers are too small to warrant the provision of services.

A proper blend of sharing and smallness seems to be the effort that is needed for the 80's. Below please find some propositions which I submit are conditions for effective organizations during the 80's. These conditions certainly apply to small schools.

1. Effective organizations begin with some tradition of cooperation among participating units.
2. Decision making procedures are specified, responsibilities are assigned that are functional to organizational purposes, and the participation of client/system representatives are maximized.
3. To develop organizational effectiveness, those in control must have the power necessary to legitimize operational procedures.
4. The establishment of attainable goals is an essential element of organizational effectiveness.
5. A communicative relationship is an important variable in organizational survival and effectiveness.
6. Political sophistication of the central administrative staff is an important criterion of organizational effectiveness and survival. A damaging credibility gap should not develop between the central staff and its clients.
7. Flexibility and procedures, and methods of working with target systems is characteristic of effective organizations.
8. Immediate and efficacious administrative response to requests from client systems are essential ingredients for survival effectiveness of organizations, especially in shared atmospheres.
9. The degree of action orientation of an organization is one of

the conditions resulting in the attainment of organization effectiveness.

10. The visibility of productivity of an organization is related to its survival and effectiveness especially in shared organizational systems.

11. Inevitably, the perception of effectiveness formed by clients over times becomes a significant variable of organizational success and failure.

CONCLUSIONS

My study of inter-district cooperation clearly demonstrates that organizational arrangements in leadership within cooperating systems themselves is much more critical to survival or death than the environmental conditions within the organizations. In a very real sense succeeding inter-district cooperation addresses all of the above listed eleven areas for effective organizational establishments. As the paper on the Role of BOCES in New York State concludes "If any district has the local resources to adequatley prepare those attending school to cope with and influence these possibilities, there is little need to cooperate with others. However, it will be a tragedy if any young person is ill-prepared for the future simply because the educational system denied the opportunities for that student to reach out and share resources beyond the local district."

In short, inter-district cooperation among all school systems is absolutely essential in the 1980's. Legislative actions in all of the different states must make it easy for sharing to occur and provide the necessary incentives where possible. There seems to be a lack of

a clear consensus on how state aid is going to be provided for cooperative incentives and sharing local resources. This lack of consensus must be addressed at every state level. Inter-district cooperation is a very vital element for the future of public school systems in the 1980's. If we neglect this issue, we will continue to raise generations of students that aren't being served as well as we might.

We are at a point right now in a number of small districts where sharing and change must begin. The stress and strain caused by this change may give rise to great dissatisfaction. Effectiveness of a planned change is often directly related to the degree in which members at all levels of a school district take part in fact finding and the diagnosing of needed changes in the formulating of the goals and programs of the change. For this reason, we need to involve, early in the process, the teaching and administrative team, the community and the Board of Education in looking at the alternatives. In this process we should give all the facts as we know them, to the community. Nothing should be hidden. Old traditions die slowly. Regionalism and resistance to change within small communities is one that will die the slowest.

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